



# NEIGHBORHOOD MOW DOWN PROGRAM

ELIMINATING WEEDED LOTS AND

*Improving Quality of Life*

[WWW.HOUSTONTX.GOV/IPS](http://WWW.HOUSTONTX.GOV/IPS)

NeighborHOU/



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# Thank you

for your interest in the Neighborhood Mow Down program. This program is managed by the Department of Neighborhoods' Inspections and Public Service Division and is part of our strategy to help neighbors advocate and engage on a neighborhood and a citywide level. We are committed to innovating government services in order to put neighbors first and ultimately measure our impact by the positive change we help create in neighborhoods. Please feel free to visit our website at [www.houstontx.gov/IPS](http://www.houstontx.gov/IPS) to learn more about our work and how we partner with neighborhoods to increase the quality of life for Houstonians.

## About Inspections and Public Service:

**What We Do:** Inspections & Public Service (IPS) uses building codes, sign codes, nuisance violations, and beautification projects to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods. The division's four sections work with community partners and residents to respond to their concerns and help vitalize neighborhoods.

**Our Vision:** To be the change in neighborhoods today, that will last tomorrow, by empowering neighbors and supporting communities.

**Our Mission:** To rid our neighborhoods of blight by embodying the same generosity and grit of our neighbors, to build strong relationships with neighborhoods, to address the root of problems, and support the success of others who also serve our neighborhoods - every day.

**Four Goals:** Improve Services, Improve Response Times, Increase Public Awareness, and Increase Compliance



## Program History

The Neighborhood Mow Down program began as a pilot in October 2013 to help tackle the problem of overgrown and abandoned lots in Houston. In partnership with Keep Houston Beautiful 501(c)(3), the program supports civic groups and nonprofit organizations to maintain abandoned lots in their neighborhoods and help eliminate eyesores and public safety hazards.



## How the Program Works

The program offers community groups a modest fee for mowing City-approved lots. The first mowing is carried out by City crews to make sure any dangerous material is removed and that it is safe for community partners to mow. Then, the community groups take responsibility for maintaining the lot when the grass grows taller than nine inches.

Participating groups are paid \$50 for each approved cut once the work has been completed and verified. Keep Houston Beautiful provides participating groups with access to tools and supplies for the projects. Abandoned properties approved for the program are located throughout the city. Participating groups are assigned to an approved property in their neighborhood. Civic associations and nonprofit organizations interested in maintaining a City-approved property are eligible to apply for participation in the program.



## Improves Quality of Life

The Neighborhood Mow Down program improves the quality of life in neighborhoods by eliminating overgrown lots. Overgrown lots bring down property value and create dangerous conditions in neighborhoods. Working together, we empower neighborhoods to create positive change, build unity, and support neighborhood pride.

## Increases Efficiency and Savings

The Neighborhood Mow Down program makes it easier for the City of Houston to maintain lots in communities. Because of our cost-savings, we are able to eliminate more weeded lots for less money.

## How neighborhoods can partner with us:

### ✓ **Report an Overgrown Lot to Houston 3-1-1**

The process of eliminating overgrown lots in neighborhoods begins when a neighbor reports it to the City of Houston. Once it is reported to us, then we try to contact the owner to get them to take responsibility for their property. If we are not able to reach them, then we determine if the lot is eligible for the Mow Down program.



### ✓ **Apply to Join the Program**

Civic clubs, super neighborhood councils, and non-profit organizations are encouraged to join the program. We can make a big difference when we work together and the Neighborhood Mow Down program is part of our commitment to working with residents to increase quality of life in Houston's neighborhoods.

## What types of neighborhood organizations can participate in the program?

In order to be eligible:

- organizations must be incorporated as a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization or partnering with a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization.

This requirement also pertains to civic associations, home owners associations, and super neighborhood councils.

You are **not** eligible if:

- you are an individual
- a community development corporation
- a political organization
- or a for-profit business

## Who do we contact for more information?

Feel free to write to us at [neighborhoods@houstontx.gov](mailto:neighborhoods@houstontx.gov) or call 832-394-0678 for more information. You may also go to [www.houstontx.gov/ips/mowdown](http://www.houstontx.gov/ips/mowdown) to learn more or apply on behalf of your organization. Please allow 10 days for your application to be processed.

# How the Neighborhood Mow Down program works:

## Step 1 - Neighbors identify an overgrown lot

Once a neighbor reports an overgrown lot to Houston 3-1-1 they will receive a service request number. We receive the information about the overgrown lot from Houston 3-1-1 and will send an inspector out to confirm that there is a violation. If there is a violation then our inspector will notify the property owner that they must correct the violation within 13 days or they will be ticketed by the City of Houston. If we cannot locate the owner, or if they do not respond, then Inspections and Public Service will determine if the lot is eligible for the Neighborhood Mow Down program or if there is a more appropriate program to adequately address the issue.

If a neighbor reports an overgrown lot and would like to include it in the Neighborhood Mow Down program, they should e-mail or call us at [neighborhoods@houstontx.gov](mailto:neighborhoods@houstontx.gov) or 832-394-0678 with the service request number they received from Houston 3-1-1. We will need that number to look into the issue and determine if it can be added to the program. The process can take between 4 – 6 weeks from the first phone call to matching a lot with an organization.

## Step 2 – Inspections and Public Service researches the lot to identify the appropriate program to address the property

Eligible lots in the Neighborhood Mow Down program must meet the following criteria:

1. Next to an elderly person's home
2. Near a school, day care and/or school zone sign
3. Criminal activity on the property (requires police report)
4. Next to an occupied residence

Every violation which Inspections and Public Service addresses falls under one of five actions. The Neighborhood Mow Down program only includes vacant lots. If there is some type of building on the lot, then that property becomes part of another one of our programs to secure it, cut the overgrown lot, work to find the owner in order to hold them responsible for their property, or demolish the building. Lots that have buildings which are considered unsecured or dangerous by the City of Houston, as well as lots that belong to a private company are not be eligible for the Neighborhood Mow Down program.

## 5 Ways We Eliminate Code Violations in Neighborhoods

### Mow Down Program

Partner with communities to cut overgrown lots

### Hire a Contractor

Hire professional landscapers to remove debris and cut exceptionally tall grass and weeds

### Make Safe Program

Secure an open building without an order for demolition and cut the lot with IPS staff

### Prepare to Demolish

Secure a dangerous building with an order for demolition

### Demolition

Tear it down

### **Step 3 - After Inspections and Public Service confirms that a lot is eligible for the Neighborhood Mow Down program, we are required to send a notification to the property owner**



After we determine that a lot is eligible for the Neighborhood Mow Down program, and the owner has not responded within 13 days, then we will send one of our inspectors to confirm that the property is still in violation (as required by Texas State law). At this point, Inspections and Public Service is allowed to send a crew out to perform a “first cut” on the lot to make sure it is manageable for our community partners to maintain and ensure that any heavy trash or dangerous materials are safely and properly removed.

### **Step 4 - Once the “first cut” has been performed, Inspections and Public Service matches the lot with an eligible organization**

The Neighborhood Mow Down program review committee will oversee target participation goals for organizations and neighborhoods. These have been established to ensure that organizations are all given an equal opportunity to participate. The review committee matches organizations with lots based on their ability to meet their partnership responsibilities as well as meet the goal of increasing the number of community organizations who take responsibility of lots in their neighborhood.



The program review committee will either:

- match an existing organization with an eligible lot if they have not exceeded the target goal for their neighborhood
- screen additional organizations for eligibility in neighborhoods if the number of eligible lots exceeds the capacity of eligible organizations

**Inspections and Public Service is a Division of the City of Houston Department of Neighborhoods**  
***We have a passion for cleaning neighborhoods!***



## Step 5 - Community partner attends an orientation to go over program expectations and responsibilities

All community organizations who have been approved to participate in the Neighborhood Mow Down program will receive a program manual which outlines the mission and goals of the program, roles and expectations, includes a program calendar, a profile of the property they will maintain on behalf of Inspections and Public Service, and attend a program orientation.

## Step 6 - Community partner continues to mow assigned lot (up to 9 times)

When the grass/weeds on one of the approved lots grows taller than nine inches, the assigned community group may check out the necessary equipment from Keep Houston Beautiful and cut the lot. Keep Houston Beautiful partners with Inspections and Public Service to make sure participating community organizations have access to gloves, litter grabbers, safety goggles, trash bags, first aid kits, safety vests, masks, mixed fuel, weed trimmers, lawn mowers and gas cans (but community groups are responsible for gasoline).



The Houston climate can make lot maintenance tricky. We have hot summers, mild winters, and go through periods of downpours and drought. We allow community organizations to cut lots up to nine times a year but it is not always necessary. Grass tends to grow more during the months between April and October than it does between the months of December to March.

### Neighborhood Mow Down Program Annual Calendar

January (Dormant)	February (Dormant)	March (Growing)	April (Growing)	May (Growing)	June (Growing)
July (Growing)	August (Growing)	September (Growing)	October (Growing)	November (Growing)	December (Dormant)

## Step 7 - Community group submits an invoice within three days of cutting a lot for Inspections and Public Service and Keep Houston Beautiful to review

Community partners are required to submit “before and after” pictures to demonstrate that the grass/weeds on the lots were at least nine inches tall before it was mowed. “Before and after” photos must be taken from the same spot to help us keep track of the many properties in the program and confirm that the work has been completed. Groups will use the Neighborhood Mow Down program webpage to enter required information for invoicing.

Required information for a complete invoice includes:

- name of community organization
- street address for property they mowed
- Case number for property they mowed
- HCAD number for property they mowed
- date the property was mowed
- date of invoice
- first and last name of the contact person
- phone number

After a lot is mowed, the organization must submit an invoice using our on-line form within three days of completing the cut.

The review committee will receive and review invoices to make sure all of the necessary information and documentation has been submitted by community groups.

Payments will be made to community group by Keep Houston Beautiful within 45 days of an approved invoice.

The screenshot shows the 'Neighborhood Mow Down Program' form on the City of Houston website. The form includes the following fields and instructions:

- Select your community group** (\*required): (Achieving Community Take-Responsibly, etc.)
- Select the street address for the lot you mowed** (\*required): [text input]
- City** (\*required): [dropdown menu with Houston selected]
- State** (\*required): [dropdown menu with Texas selected]
- Enter the Project Number for the property you mowed** (\*required): [text input]
- Enter the HCAD Number for the lot you mowed** (\*required): [text input]
- Enter the date the property was mowed** (\*required): [date picker]
- Invoice date** (Please enter today's date) (\*required): [date picker]
- Your first name** (\*required): [text input]
- Your last name** (\*required): [text input]
- E-mail** (\*required): [text input]
- Best phone number to contact you** (\*required): [text input]
- Upload a picture of the lot before it was mowed** (\*required): [file upload button]
- Upload a picture of the lot after it was mowed** (\*required): [file upload button]
- Questions and Comments**: [text area]
- Send** button

At the bottom, there is a footer with links: Home, What To, Government, Residents, Business, Departments, Visitors, Expanded.

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To learn more about the Department of  
Neighborhoods visit our website at  
[www.houstontx.gov/neighborhoods](http://www.houstontx.gov/neighborhoods)  
and join our on-line community on Facebook, Twitter,  
or Instagram by searching for “NeighborHou.”



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